

Tips when giving to charities

There are many ways to safeguard yourself from being victim to scams when donating to charitable organizations.

- Only give to established charities. Always donate to organizations that you are either familiar or that are known for assisting disaster relief efforts. Be especially cautious of charities that come up only in response to a specific hurricane or with unfamiliar names.
- Always research charities. Make sure to review information about the charity before you decide to give. Charities soliciting in New York must be registered with the Office of the Attorney General's Charities Bureau. Go online to the Attorney General's website, www.charitiesnys.com to review tax returns and audit reports. Verify that the charity that you are interested in giving to is a recognized tax-exempt organization.

The following websites have helpful information to evaluate charities:

- American Institute of Philanthropy – charitywatch.org
- Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance – bbb.org
- Charity Navigator – charitynavigator.org
- GuideStar – guidestar.org
- Be extra careful with Telephone solicitations. Ask the person who is trying to solicit from you if they are “a paid fundraiser.” If yes, ask them if they are registered in New York. If not, do not contribute to their charity.
- If you are considering a contribution through text messaging, check the charity's website or call the charity to confirm that it has authorized donations to be made through texts. Do not forget that some contributions will only reach the charity until after your cellphone bill is paid. Therefore, it may be faster to donate directly to the charity.
- Inquire how your donation will be used, and what specific organizations your donations will support. Also ask what the charity will do with any excess donations. Avoid contributing to charities that are vague with their answers and be mindful if an organization will not give any written information about charitable programs and its finances when asked.
- Avoid Unsolicited Spam Emails because these formats are not usually associated with legitimate charities. Go online to the Department of Homeland Security's website to find more tips on dealing with spam emails at <http://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/tips/STo4-014>.
- Never donate with cash. Make sure to always give your contributions by credit card or a check made payable to the specific charity.
- Be mindful when giving out personal information. Make sure you are familiar and comfortable with the organization you wish to donate too. Avoid giving credit card or other personal information over the phone or through text message.
- Report suspicious organizations. If you feel as though an organization is a scam or misrepresenting its work, contact the Attorney General's Charities Bureau at charities.complaints@ag.ny.gov or at 212-416-8401.